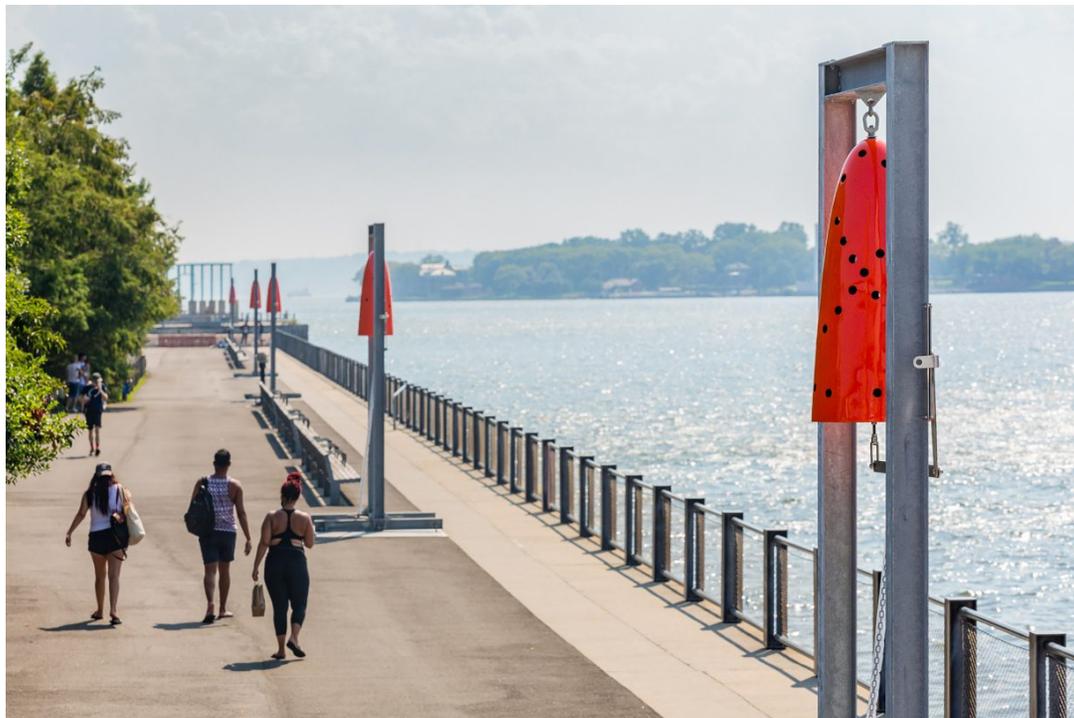


ArtReview

Davina Semo: "In Post-Quarantine New York, Artist Davina Semo's Bells Disturb the Peace"

By Sam Korman

September 3, 2020



Davina Semo, 'Reverberation', 2020, Patinated cast bronze bell, UV protected 2-stage catalyzed urethane automotive finish, galvanized steel chain and hardware, clapper.

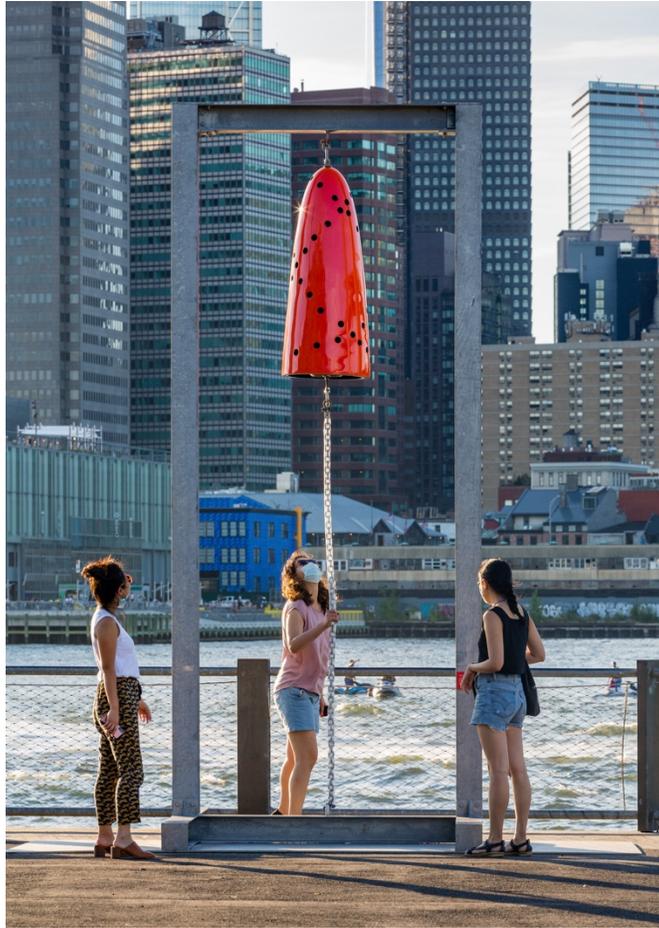
Photo Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco; Photograph: Nicholas Knight, Courtesy of Public Art Fund, NY

The installation 'Reverberation' – five neon-orange bells in Brooklyn Bridge Park – invites mischief from any passerby

Davina Semo's installation *Reverberation* overlooks Manhattan from an inviting stretch of Brooklyn Bridge Park, on the other side of the East River. There, the artist has installed five neon-orange bells, each one strung from sturdy aluminium frame. Even on the overcast day I make my visit, they glisten beautifully against the backdrop of the harbour, the low light shining through the unique constellations of holes that perforate each one. Yet, in spite of their enticing exterior, it's the chain attached to the clapper that eventually proves to be their most inviting feature. Jerking it back and forth works up a satisfying – and deafening – clamour.

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Photo Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco; Photograph: Nicholas Knight, Courtesy of Public Art Fund, NY

It's impossible not to read Semo's project in relation to Lower Manhattan. *Reverberation's* raucousness speaks to the tension between the two boroughs – asking of the imperious skyline, 'Oh, you think you're better than me?' But I'm not the only person with a message to send. A guy in his late thirties raps the clapper for almost a minute, then proudly struts past me having clearly enjoyed himself. Later, a twenty-something yuppie tugs on the chains for a stroke or two before retreating to his girlfriend, who pats him on the back, knowing he's got it out of his system. Unfortunately, I never see a woman ring a bell, though one particularly gothy teen circles the installation the whole time I'm there. Nerves get the better of her. I truly hope she finds another way to let it out, whatever it may be.

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Photo Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman, San Francisco; Photograph: Nicholas Knight, Courtesy of Public Art Fund, NY

Semo's project comfortably inhabits postquarantine New York. On one hand, these participatory artworks stand in for the renaissance of public space New Yorkers are currently enjoying (at least until winter arrives). With restaurants claiming parking spots for café seating, parks playing host to every birthday party and certain streets closed to traffic, life has been brought down to the level of the pedestrian. On the other hand, the bells are emblematic of the widespread upheavals overtaking the United States: they permit any passerby to disturb the peace. Yet *Reverberation* no more seeks to reconcile the public's seemingly contradictory intentions for occupying public space – normalisation versus radicalisation, socialisation versus individual expression – than it predicts which one will predominate in American politics. Rather, it speaks to the tension that pervades any public encounter, availing itself of the public platform to stoke the average person's penchant for mischief.

Davina Semo, Reverberation, is on view at Brooklyn Bridge Park, New York, until 18 April 2021.

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